

Landscapes review - National Parks and AONBs: Review to consider the next steps for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty sites (AONBs) in England.

Interim findings of the landscapes review

Letters between Julian Glover and Michael Gove setting out the interim findings of the designated landscapes review

July 2019

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Letter from Julian Glover to Michael Gove

Julian Glover
BY EMAIL

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Defra
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

15 July 2019

DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES REVIEW

Dear Secretary of State,

It is a year since I began leading the Designated Landscapes Review, which the government commissioned in response to the 25-year Environment Plan.

I intend to be ready to publish a complete report in the autumn. Before then we have agreed that it would be helpful to provide you with a short guide to our thoughts.

This letter sets out in broad terms what we have found, what we think could be done better and what officials might start doing now to prepare to implement the review, if ministers decide to do so.

What we have done

I have made sure our review has been open and responsive, and have given everyone a chance to tell us what they think.

In the last year members of our panel of six have been to every English National Park and - soon - will have been to every AONB, as well as to National Parks in Scotland and many unprotected landscapes.

Our call for evidence received over 2,500 responses - detailed and enthusiastic submissions from organisations and individuals. We have held many meetings in London with bodies representing those interested in our landscapes. We have also worked with the Policy Lab team in the Cabinet Office, who have made powerful films working with people whose voices are less likely to be heard, including those in cities who are not traditional visitors

to the countryside - and we hope an ambitious response to this will be a core part of the new ways our landscapes work.

People everywhere have been generous with their time and ideas. I thank in particular the members of our panel: Sarah Mukherjee, Fiona Reynolds, Jim Dixon, Ewen Cameron and Jake Fiennes, as well as the excellent support we have received from Defra officials.

What we have found

The message from all this work has been vigorous and clear. We should not be satisfied with what we have at the moment. It falls short of what can be achieved, what the people of our country want and what the government says it expects in the 25-year plan for the environment.

Some of this failure comes from the fact that our protected landscapes have not been given the tools, the funding and the direction to do the job we should now expect of them. I want to praise the commitment of those who work to protect our landscapes today. Everywhere I've been I've seen energy, enthusiasm and examples of success.

Supporting schools, youth ranger schemes, farm clusters, joint working with all sorts of organisations, tourism, planning and design, backing local businesses, coping with the complexities of local and central government - things like this happen every day, not much thanks is given for them and yet much of it is done well, for relatively small sums.

But all this impressive effort is not achieving anything like as much as it could.

Why? Because the national zeal of the founding mission for landscape protection has been eroded. There is a culture which has neither kept pace with changes in our society nor responded with vigour to the decline in the diversity of the natural environment.

We need to reignite the fire and vision which brought this system into being in 1949. We need our finest landscapes to be places of natural beauty which look up and outwards to the nation they serve.

In essence, our review will ask not 'what do protected landscapes need?', but "what does the nation need from them today?".

What needs to change

The underlying argument of our review is that our system of designated landscapes should be a positive force for improvement with big ambitions

made possible by these 44 areas uniting to become more than the sum of their parts.

More must be done for nature and beauty. More must be done for people who live in and visit our landscapes, too. And a lot more must be done to meet the needs of our many fellow citizens who do not know the countryside at the moment, or do not always feel welcome in it, but should be able to enjoy it. Our landscapes are open and free to all, but nonetheless can seem exclusive.

- Our system of landscape protection today is fragmented, sometimes marginalised and often misunderstood. We believe this leads to duplication, wastes resources and diminishes ambition. We will make proposals to address this, and will explore the potential for a National Landscape Service in the final report.
- We think in particular the current system of governance for National Parks should be reformed. Time after time we have heard and seen that boards are too big, do not do a good job in setting a strategic direction and ambition, and are unrepresentative of both society and, at times, of the things parks should be leading on, such as natural beauty, climate change, and diversity.
- We think that AONBs should be strengthened, with increased funding, new purposes and a greater voice on development. We have been impressed by what they often achieve now through partnership working.
- We would like to see the encouragement of a wider range of non-designated systems of landscape protection. This could include new areas of forest, along the lines of the successful National Forest in the East Midlands, and support for proposals for new urban National Parks such as the one proposed for the West Midlands, and the impressive work being done to bring the South Pennines together as a regional park. We also praise London's National Park City movement.
- The 2010 Lawton Review and the most recent 2016 State of Nature Report are explicit about the crisis of nature and what needs to be done to bring about a recovery. We agree and we want to see designated landscapes lead the response.
- Our system of landscape protection has been hampered by having little influence over the things which have done most harm to nature, including a system of farming subsidies which, although it has improved, rewarded intensification regardless of the consequences.

- But we would also like to see a change in internal culture to do more on this. As the National Trust put it, in its submission to our call for evidence, “We believe that National Parks and AONBs are not currently delivering on their duty in relation to nature”.
- We would like to see designated landscapes become leaders in Nature Recovery Networks.
- Our landscapes are largely farmed landscapes and we think a partnership with farming which promotes nature recovery is needed. Our designated landscapes should be bold about the potential of subsidy reform, with the forthcoming Environmental Land Management System. We think all protected landscapes should be priorities for ELMs payments delivering nature recovery through farming.
- We would like to see them develop landscape scale, long term strategies to assess and improve natural capital in the areas they oversee as it is now, and as it could become - working with landowners through local ELMs plans.
- We want to see them take a lead in the national response to climate change in order to help them meet the goal of net-zero by 2050.
- We have found that many National Parks have not moved quickly or smartly enough to reflect our changing society, and in some cases show little desire to do so. We are all effectively paying for Designated Landscapes through taxation. Much more must be done to encourage first time visitors and a more diverse range of visitors.
- We heard repeatedly that the MOSAIC programme working with BAME groups had been a huge success - but it was a one-off, and largely fell away when its initial funding ran out. We want to see a new version of it brought in as a priority.
- Although there are already examples of links with the National Health Service there is no overall agreement about how these two great institutions from the post-war settlement might work together. Social prescribing has huge potential to improve physical and mental health at low cost.
- In almost every place we visited we heard similar warnings about the challenge communities face. Residents are getting older. Local communities see housing costs climb while not much affordable housing is built to add to

the supply. We will make a specific proposal in our final report to for a proactive way for landscapes to address the shortage of social housing.

- We recognise that all calls for more public money to be spent will face understandable scrutiny. Budgets are tight for a reason. But doing more will cost more. We want to see our landscapes funded from a wider range of sources and will make proposals in the final report.
- But as John Dower wrote in 1945, “if National Parks are provided for the nation they should clearly be provided for by the nation”. At the very least we want to see existing budgets for National Parks secured in real terms and sustained for a further five year period. Any new National Park designations must be funded with additional money not from the current budget.
- We believe there is a very strong case for increasing funding to AONBs. We will make proposals in our final review.
- We have been asked to give our view on the potential for new designations. We will set this out in our final report.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julian Glover". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Julian Glover
Independent Review Lead
Designated Landscapes Review

Letter from Michael Gove to Julian Glover

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
From the Secretary of State for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

T 03459 335577
defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

Julian Glover
Landscapes.Review@defra.gov.uk

16 July 2019

Dear Julian,

Thank you for your letter detailing the interim findings of your Review of Designated Landscapes. I am immensely grateful to you and your panel for all the hard work you have undertaken to date.

Last year I asked you to conduct a Review of England's Designated Landscapes as part of the Government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment. We recognised the value of beautiful landscapes in creating a thriving natural environment - I asked you and your panel to ask open questions about how National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty could meet the needs of those who work, live and seek enjoyment there, and be truly special places for nature and beauty.

One year on, I am delighted to read your analysis of what needs to change and can be done. I believe your findings will spark enthusiasm and debate in all those who care about our designated landscapes – and for those who do not ordinarily consider National Parks and AONBs to be 'their' places. Your report can also provide the foundation for the renewed vigour that I agree is needed to rediscover that national zeal illustrated by those founders of the National Parks movement that you describe.

It is fitting that, on the 70th Anniversary of the Act of Parliament that made our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty possible, you are setting out your views on what is needed for the long-term health of these places. You urge ambition – this is a challenge and a call to action to which all should listen. I look forward to the completion of your report, and your formal recommendations later this year.

With every good wish,

Michael Gove



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landscapes.review@defra.gov.uk